

WALLOON, THE LANGUAGE OF WALLONIA.

Union Culturelle Wallonne

Nivèle/Waufe/Walon/Powésîye/(è)sc
rire/Av'nir/Waloniye/Pârler/Gârç
on/Vîr voltî/Franz Lewandelaer/T
ournai/Ath/Charlèrwè/El Louvière/
George Fays/Tèyâte/Scrijådje/Lîx
/Tins a v'ni/Waloniye/Ljouwer/Pî
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èrvî/Derbu/Hinri Simon/Lj'han Rat
hmès/Colas Defrecheux/Bati/Walon/
Tchanson/Scrire/Mûn'di/Annances/
Walon'rèye/Lj'zer/Valèt/Marcèl Hi
cter/Môrice Piron/Hinri Brégarde/
Gaumas/Li Rotche/Lu Tchêstê/Virt
ang/Soçan/Ûtchè/R'kêre/Namêur/Bâ
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costumances/Aprinde/Waloniye/Veûy
voltî/Joseph Calozet/Nivèle/Waufe
/Walon/Powésîye/(è)scrire/Av'nir/
Waloniye/Pârler/Gârçon/Vîr voltî/
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Traduction of Laurence SLANGEN



In the north, the linguistic border that was fixed administratively and politically in 1962 separates the Walloon-speaking area from the Dutch-speaking area (with the following dialects: Flemish, Southern-Brabançon, Limbourgeois and Fouronnais).

In the east, the Walloon area borders on the Central German area. To be more accurate, in the Province of Liège the bordering area is the canton of Eupen where a more or less germanized Low Franconian is spoken and the Canton of Saint-Vith where Middle Moselle Franconian is spoken. In the Province of

Luxemburg the same Moselle Franconian is spoken in the Arlon area (Arelerland).

In the same Province of Luxemburg, the dialect of Lorraine is spoken in the Gaume (more or less south of the Semois river) and Champenois is spoken in a number of villages some of which are in the Province of Namur. On the other hand, in that province, Walloon extends beyond the French border (in the enclave of Givet).

Finally, in the Provinces of Brabant and Hainaut, the border between Walloon and the Picardy dialect runs from north to south, approximately from Tubize to Montignies-Saint-Christophe then to Rièzes (French border).

Let me also remind you of the areas that cannot be seen on the map (and for good reason) namely the areas in Wisconsin where Walloon immigrants settled in 1853.

**The four main
dialects**

The long series of dialectal variations in the Walloon area very often gives the layman the impression of an inextricable tangle. However, dialectologists do pick up phonetical and lexical characteristics (isoglosses) that enable them to classify those variations into four subdialects.

- 1. In the east of Brabant and of the Province of Namur, the NAMUROIS dialect that, moreover, extends beyond the French enclave of Givet;*
 - 2. In the west of Brabant, the rest of the Province of Namur and the east of Hainaut, WALLO-PICARD;*
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Walloon, the language of Wallonia

3. In the Province of Liège and the north of Luxemburg, the LIEGEOIS dialect;
4. In the rest of Luxemburg, WALLO-LORRAIN.

(See the map above where the walloon area is limited in the west and the south-east by a double broken line, whereas, inside the same area, the four subdialects are separated by a single broken line.)

Are these homogenous linguistic zones?

The areas described above are not always as homogenous as the neat lines on the map suggest. Sometimes, along the borders, neighbouring dialects mingle. That is why such terms as "Wallo-Picard" and "Wallo-Lorrain" are needed.

There are even variations from town to town, from village to village.

Levels of language and registers

Like all living languages, Walloon does not show only geographical varieties.

I shall not insist on the specificity of literary writing where the search of esthetics effects leads to a questioning of the norms.

Let me consider language in its most natural and essential function: the communication of a message. Further on I shall show the reasons that can lead to the choice of the dialect instead of French. Like French, Walloon comprises language levels and, particularly, language registers.

1. By level I mean the degree of competence reached by the speaking subject. The level depends on age, culture, social status and profession. So there are juvenile, popular, technical, rural, slang vocabularies etc.
2. The register depends on the context of the message. It can range from vulgar to affected, to familiar, friendly and refined. Not to mention the connotations linked to the use of the familiar "tu" instead of the "vous" form.

Archaisms and neologisms

Finally, language develops with time. This evolution does not seem significant if we consider the oldest texts that date back to the beginning of the 18th century. However, dictionaries such as Jean Haust's for the Liégeois dialect point to a large amount of archaisms as well as neologisms.

There is nothing surprising about that and numerous factors favour that evolution. Words disappear with the things they designate whereas new terms appear to designate new things. Numerous words were borrowed from French when it became the dominant language of our bilingualism. But Walloon, always up to now, has also borrowed from the Germanic dialects, particularly those of the bordering areas.

Short linguistic history of Romance Belgium

The origins

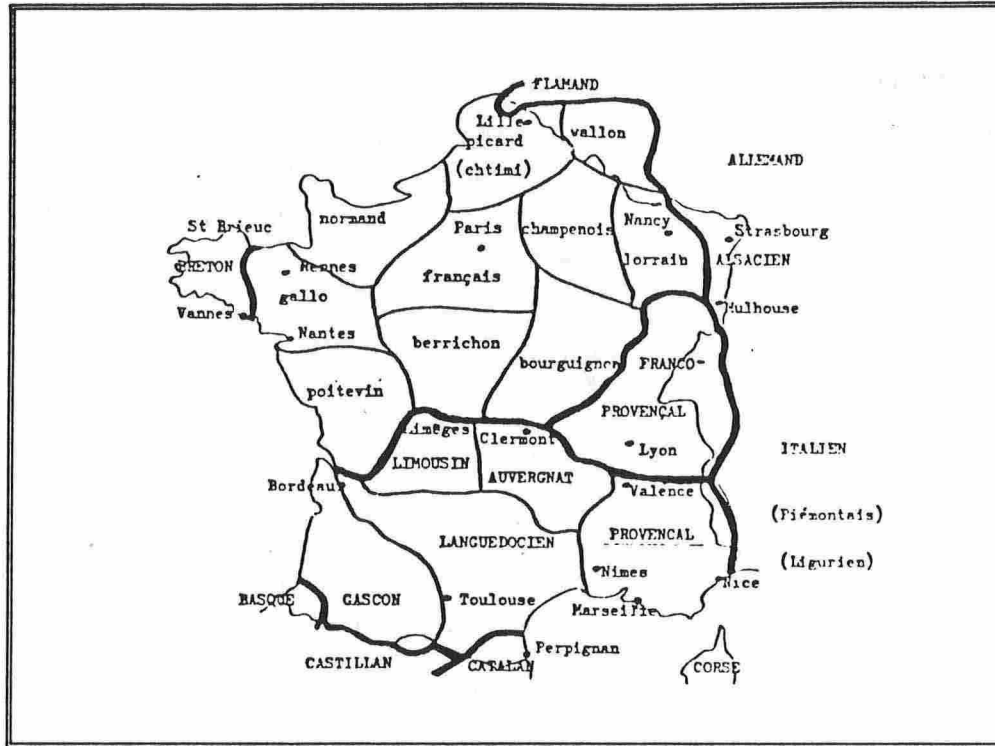
In fact, the pre-history and the history of Walloon are linked to those of the Romance dialects and particularly to the most prestigious among them, French.

The story begins in the 1st century BC, in Gaul. The south-east has been a Romance province since 116. The population speaks a Celtic language, Gaulish, that probably comprises many dialects.

The romanization starts after Caesar's military campaigns. The linguistic romanization will be slow and Latin will only triumph completely in the 4th century AD. Around the 4th century AD, Gaulish is reduced to a substratum of which some traces are still visible. It should be noted that I am talking of vulgar Latin, i.e. Latin as spoken by the people and quite different from the classic Latin of the literary works. That vulgar Latin will undergo a series of transformations. On the other hand, from the 3rd century onwards, the Franks invade Gaul and, around 450, they rule over our area.

Half a century later, they have reached the Marne and the Seine Rivers. As a result our language is influenced by Germanic contributions which are more or less important according to the depth of penetration.

The Latin character however is not altered. The new linguistic layer is the superstratum. But the purely Latin structures are going to fall into decay so that in the middle of the 8th century a new language is born: Gallo-Romance or, more simply, Romance.



Origin of the dialects

Let me analyse the three components of that Romance dialect. The Gallic substratum was probably different from tribe to tribe. The Latin heritage was not important everywhere because it was linked to the depth of romanization. Finally, the Germanic implantation was not as deeply marked everywhere. This is at least partly why Gallo-Romance shows very early a number of regional variants called dialects, the geographical repartition of which can be seen on the map.

On the map, the bold lines delimit three large areas :

1. In the north, the langue d'oïl;
2. In the south, the langue d'oc;
3. In the centre, the Franco-Provençal.

The future Wallonia, with the four above mentioned dialects (Picard, Wallon, Lorrain and Champenois) lies in the Oïl area.

I would like to name a precise birthdate for Walloon ⁽¹⁾, but all that can be said is that some characteristics appear even before 800. Anyway, it is clearly differentiated at the beginning of the 13th century. At the same time the subdialects are already individualised, especially that of Liège.

Development of a French-Walloon bilingualism

Another Oïl dialect, Francien, the dialect of Isle-de-France, was to have an extraordinary destiny. It was the ancestor of Old French and, of course, of Middle-French and Modern French. Its expansion is linked to well-known political circumstances: the origin and development of the kingdom of France. Its influence was to cross the borders of the kingdom. It was undoubtedly introduced in Wallonia by the beginning of the 13th century, on the one hand as the language of moralizing literary works, on the other hand in administrative documents. The oldest date to back 1194 (Chièvres), 1222 (Mons), 1223 Liège) and 1240 (Namur). The language of those documents, called *scripta*, is in fact French with some traces of dialect. Such are the origins of the French-Walloon bilingualism. But how did it develop in everyday life? The educated classes probably learned French fairly early, whereas ordinary townsfolk, illiterate as they were, certainly acquired a passive knowledge of it.

1. The word "Wallon" meaning dialect appeared, as far as I know, for the first time in 1564.

**From the 16th to the
18th century**

Our French-Walloon bilingualism had now found its balance. Two facts ought to be remembered for those three centuries:

1. *1600 marks the end of the Old Walloon period*
2. *It is also the date of the first written records. Walloon literature is in its infancy. It produces Christmas carols, adapted from French, pasquinades and occasional writings whose authors, when known, belong to the intellectual milieu.*

*It is not before the middle of the 18th century (1757 and 1758) that works of a better quality appear: four light operas under the overall title **Le Théâtre Liégeois**, the most famous among them being **Li voyèdje di Tchôfontinne**. Four authors wrote it in collaboration: Simon de Harlez, Jacques-Joseph Fabry, Pierre-Grégoire de Vivario, Pierre-Robert de Cartier de Marcienne.*

Walloon literature is outside the scope of this study. However, I have underlined these few facts because they lead to an important observation: during those two centuries the dialect is very much in use among the nobility and the upper middle class even if only for entertainment or relaxation.

**The 19th and 20th
centuries**

At the beginning of the 19th century, Walloon speakers began to raise the alarm when they noticed the decline of the dialect under the pressure of French.

The progress of the latter was due to various factors: the development of education, the increasing influence of the media, administrative requirements, the increasing mobility of the population which broke up village and parish communities, and also the concerted action of anti-dialectal movements in France as well as in French-speaking Belgium. The advocates of these movements held Walloon in contempt because they thought it to be a vulgar language. They also considered it politically dangerous. It thus reached a point where children who dared speak Walloon at school were punished. There is a curious paradox here. It was precisely in the middle of the 19th century, when the decline in the use of dialect began to cause concern, that a very productive period of Walloon literature began.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the balance between the two languages was becoming increasingly uneven. The dialects ceased to be the mother-tongue of the Walloon people and French - or rather a variety of French, as will be shown further on - became the dominant language.

This change, however, has not stopped our natural bilingualism, indestructible even among those who do not feel concerned by this phenomenon. Its functioning calls for some more explanation.

Functioning and consequences of French-Walloon bilingualism

In the absence of statistics on a large scale, the balance of power between the two languages is hard to judge. Let me only remind you of the observations made above.

As opposed to the geographically diversified dialect, French emerged as the language of communication. It became the mother-tongue instead of Walloon, which although still alive, became a secondary language. Its status came to vary according to milieu, generation, geography etc.

Walloon seems to maintain a strong position among the working-class and in rural areas, with one reservation: better Walloon-speakers can sometimes be found among intellectuals anxious to avoid a mixture of the two linguistic codes. The social status of the speaker and of the person addressed determines the choice of the linguistic code. But above all one must emphasise the specific role of Walloon to express feelings and emotions.

It is said to be "the expression of our deepest intimacy".

On the other hand, French as spoken in Wallonia has absorbed phonetic characteristics, words and structures from the three dialects. So our French has regional features and is clearly distinct from standardised Parisian French.

Walloon features in regional French were for long considered as mistakes, and grammarians tried to eradicate them in an attempt to purify the language. However, it is noticeable that those features are not always regarded as undesirable. The notion of mistake has been questioned and the right to be different has been demanded even for language. Without going so far, I should like to make clear to those who use the pretext of contamination to fight against Walloon, that if Walloon disappeared, there would still remain a substantial dialectal substratum that would influence French. Furthermore, a better knowledge of a dialect can make a speaker more aware of the differences in the forms of expression in each linguistic code.

